



Role of Academic Leaders' Emotional Intelligence and Staff Commitment in Public Universities in Oromia Region

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the role of academic leaders' emotional intelligence and staff organizational commitment in public universities in Oromia Region, Ethiopia, focusing on the four dimensions of emotional intelligence: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship management. A correlational research design with a quantitative approach was employed, and data were collected from 358 active academic staff members using a subordinate-rated questionnaire to assess leaders' emotional intelligence and a self-administered questionnaire to measure staff organizational commitment. Descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, and multiple regression analysis were utilized to analyze the data. The findings revealed a moderate level of emotional intelligence among academic leaders ($M = 3.59$). Significant moderate positive correlations were observed between the four emotional intelligence dimensions and organizational commitment, with correlation coefficients ranging from $r^ = .51$ to $r^* = .56$. Furthermore, the regression analysis indicated that leaders' emotional intelligence significantly predicted staff organizational commitment, accounting for 27% of the variance ($R^2 = .27$), suggesting a moderate predictive role. This study provides empirical evidence on existence of the role of emotional intelligence in fostering academic staff commitment within the Oromia public universities and serves as a foundational reference for further research. Accordingly, it is recommended that the Ministry of Education, university administrators, and academic leaders prioritize the development and application of emotional intelligence competencies to enhance staff commitment.*

Keywords: emotional intelligence, staff commitment, academic leaders, public universities.

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Leadership constitutes a fundamental process through which individuals influence groups toward achieving common objectives (Northouse, 2023). Contemporary organizations require leaders to cultivate interpersonal connections, build trust, and demonstrate adaptability—capacities fundamentally rooted in emotional intelligence (Goleman, 2021). As organizations increasingly recognize the centrality of emotional dynamics, emotional intelligence (EI) has emerged as a critical determinant of leadership effectiveness, with research suggesting it accounts for a substantial proportion of organizational leaders' success (Cherniss & Goleman, 2001; Duran & Smith, 2024; Goleman, 1998).

Conceptually, EI in leadership refers to the capacity to perceive, understand, and constructively manage emotions, both one's own and those of others. Among existing frameworks, Goleman's (1998, 2022) mixed model demonstrates particular relevance to organizational contexts due to its comprehensive integration of personal and interpersonal competencies across four dimensions: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness (empathy), and relationship management. These competencies enable leaders to foster psychologically safe environments that promote trust, collaboration, and sustained commitment among followers (Aamir, 2023; Parish, 2015).

Organizational commitment, defined as the psychological bond of attachment, identification, and engagement between employees and their organization (Meyer & Allen, 1991; Steers, 1977), represents a significant determinant of institutional effectiveness. Meyer and Allen's (1997) three-component framework distinguishes among distinct motivational bases: affective commitment (emotional attachment), continuance commitment (perceived costs of leaving), and normative commitment (moral obligation to remain). This tripartite model provides a comprehensive lens for examining how leadership behaviors, such as EI, may differentially influence each type of commitment within academic settings.

Globally, meta-analytic evidence confirms that leaders demonstrating EI competencies consistently foster higher staff attachment and retention (Goleman, 2020; Miao et al., 2017). Across European universities, academic leaders with higher EI scores exhibited staff turnover rates significantly lower than those with low EI (Parker et al., 2017). In the United States, faculty who rated their department heads as emotionally intelligent was almost twice as likely to express strong affective commitment (Lee et al., 2023). A meta-analysis by Dogru (2022) provided further support for the positive relationship between EI and organizational commitment across various sectors, while scholars such as Basel Al and Ghazzawi (2019) and Kaur and Hirudayaraj (2021) have highlighted that EI enhances commitment by influencing job satisfaction, occupational stress, and organizational culture.

Within African contexts, emergent studies affirm this positive role. Ezeokoli and Nwokolo (2024) documented significant impacts of EI on employee commitment within Nigerian construction firms, while Waweru et al. (2020) revealed principals' EI as a pivotal factor influencing teacher commitment in Kenyan secondary schools. Extending this narrative to Ethiopia, Kassahun and Raman (2023) established that relationship management was a key domain of EI among academic

leaders in strengthening staff engagement and organizational commitment. However, some findings remain inconsistent, with several studies reporting weak or non-significant correlations between leader EI and staff commitment (Abbas et al., 2021; Miller et al., 2022). This inconsistency points to the likely presence of unexamined boundary conditions specifically contextual or cultural factors that may either amplify or attenuate the role of EI underscoring the need for further investigation in under-researched settings.

Given Ethiopia's cultural emphasis on collectivism and relational harmony (Abel Haileselassie, 2025; Gerbi, 2018), understanding how emotionally intelligent leadership enhances staff commitment is imperative. This study therefore examines the role of academic leaders' emotional intelligence and staff organizational commitment in Oromia public universities, offering evidence-based insights for policy and practice.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

In an era of increasing global competition and systemic complexity, the success of higher education institutions is increasingly dependent on the quality of their leadership. While technical expertise has traditionally been the cornerstone of academic leadership, contemporary scholarship emphasizes that these skills alone are insufficient (Goleman, 1998; Liu, 2023). Emotional intelligence has emerged as a critical determinant of effective leadership, with profound implications for fostering a committed and productive academic workforce (Al Shehhi et al., 2021; Parish, 2015). Ideally, emotionally intelligent academic leaders create psychologically safe environments that promote trust and collaboration, thereby strengthening faculty organizational commitment and institutional effectiveness (Goleman, 2001).

However, higher education institutions worldwide face significant challenges when academic leaders lack well-developed emotional competencies. Leaders who fail to exhibit emotional awareness inadvertently contribute to strained work environments, resulting in diminished staff morale, communication breakdowns, and reduced institutional effectiveness (Aamir, 2023; Jamroz, 2019). While a substantial body of research has explored the role of EI in organizational commitment across developed contexts, the situation in Africa particularly within higher education remains comparatively understudied (Ogunyemi & Ojo, 2020; Tegegne & Wendimu, 2024). University enrollment across sub-Saharan Africa has more than doubled over the past two decades, far outpacing leadership development and leaving many institutions helmed by academically qualified but potentially emotionally unskilled leaders (UNESCO, 2024; World Bank, 2022).

In Nigeria, for instance, a substantial proportion of academic staff reported working under leaders lacking basic emotional competencies such as empathy, correlating with a significantly higher intent to leave (Oyinlola, 2022). Similarly, across East African universities, a considerable percentage of academic staff reported exposure to demeaning leadership behaviors, a practice associated with notable declines in organizational commitment (Mbeki & Ndlovu, 2021). Despite this evidence linking emotionally deficient leadership to reduced commitment, scant African research has systematically examined the role of leadership behaviors in the relationship between emotional intelligence and commitment dynamic.

Focusing specifically on Ethiopia, the higher education sector has grown from just two public universities in 1990 to over fifty today, creating notable leadership deficits (Ministry of Education, 2023). A national assessment found that the majority of newly appointed deans and department heads received no formal leadership training, with an overwhelming proportion feeling unprepared to manage the emotional and relational aspects of their roles (Asmamaw & Semela, 2023). Studies reveal consistent complaints of technically competent yet emotionally disconnected leaders, with staff describing themselves as "invisible," "undervalued," and hesitant to speak openly (Getachew, 2021, p. 45). Consequently, a significant proportion of Ethiopian academic staff exhibit what Belay and Lehal (2019) termed *quiet quitting* psychological disengagement despite continued physical presence and a considerable percentage have actively considered leaving their positions, citing poor leadership as the primary reason (Kassahun et al., 2021). The annual staff attrition rate in Ethiopian universities currently exceeds the national average, exacerbating institutional instability (Ministry of Education, 2023).

Despite this evidence, significant gaps persist in the Ethiopian higher education context. Limited research has systematically investigated on this study in Ethiopian public universities (Tegegne & Wendimu, 2024; Wolle, 2022). Compounding this issue, Ethiopian public universities continue to recruit and promote leaders almost exclusively based on technical qualifications and seniority, with no systematic assessment of emotional intelligence (Tegegne & Wendimu, 2024). Moreover, the Ethiopian Education Policy provides no operational guidelines for developing EI in university leaders (Ministry of Education, 2023).

Within the public universities in Oromia Region specifically, no known study has examined on this study creating a contextual gap in the literature. Furthermore, Ethiopia's collectivist cultural context,

which emphasizes hierarchical respect, inhibits open communication between leaders and staff, potentially complicating the translation of leadership competencies into faculty commitment (Abate et al., 2023; Mulugeta & Zewdie, 2022). Consequently, the extent to which academic leaders' EI predicts staff organizational commitment remains an unanswered empirical question in this specific context. This study offers policy and practical value by providing empirical insights to inform leadership recruitment, training, and HR practices, thereby enhancing staff commitment, reducing turnover, and strengthening institutional effectiveness. Addressing the identified gaps, this research examines the role of academic leaders' emotional intelligence and staff organizational commitment in Oromia public universities. Ultimately, this inquiry aims to contribute useful evidence for Ethiopian higher education policy and leadership development, guided by following research questions:

1. What is the perceived current status of emotional intelligence of academic leaders in public universities in Oromia Region?
2. To what extent do the four dimensions of academic leaders' emotional intelligence (self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship management) correlate significantly with academic staff organizational commitment?
3. To what extent does academic leaders' emotional intelligence influence academic staff organizational commitment?

2. Theoretical Frame Work

This study integrates two complementary theoretical models to examine the role of academic leaders' emotional intelligence in fostering staff organizational commitment: Goleman's Mixed Model of Emotional Intelligence (Goleman, 1995, 1998) and Meyer and Allen's Three-Component Model of Organizational Commitment (Meyer & Allen, 1991, 1997).

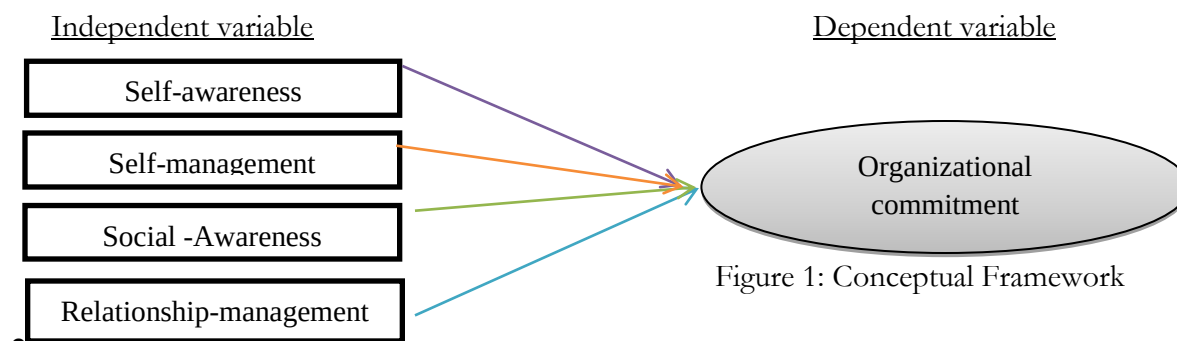
Goleman's model conceptualizes emotional intelligence across four interrelated dimensions: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship management (Goleman, 2022). Leaders who demonstrate these competencies are better equipped to inspire commitment, reduce turnover, and cultivate positive work climates (Goleman, 2020). Meyer and Allen's model complements this perspective by delineating organizational commitment into three distinct dimensions: affective (emotional attachment), continuance (perceived costs of leaving), and normative (moral obligation to remain) (Meyer & Allen, 1997). This framework captures the

multifaceted nature of employee loyalty and provides a robust foundation for examining how leadership behaviors may differentially influence each type of commitment.

The integration of these frameworks is grounded in the premise that emotionally intelligent leaders create psychologically safe environments characterized by trust, respect, and mutual understanding (Goleman, 2020). Such environments foster affective commitment by satisfying employees' needs for belonging and recognition, strengthen normative commitment through reciprocal obligation, and may influence continuance commitment by enhancing the perceived value of remaining within a supportive institutional context (Kassahun & Raman, 2023). By systematically exploring how each dimension of leaders' emotional intelligence relates to staff commitment, this integrated framework enables comprehensive examination of the emotional intelligence-commitment relationship within Ethiopian higher education.

2.1 Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study illustrates the hypothesized role of academic leaders' emotional intelligence in fostering staff organizational commitment. The independent variable is academic leaders' emotional intelligence, comprising four dimensions: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship management. The dependent variable is academic staff organizational commitment, comprising three dimensions: affective, continuance, and normative commitment, as adapted from Goleman's (1998) emotional intelligence model and Meyer and Allen's (1997) organizational commitment model (see Figure 1). The framework posits that academic leaders' emotional intelligence plays a significant role in influencing each dimension of academic staff organizational commitment within the context of public universities in Oromia Region, Ethiopia.



2.2 Rationale for the Study

This study examines the role of academic leaders' emotional intelligence and staff organizational commitment in public universities in Oromia Region, Ethiopia, grounded in theoretical, policy, and practical considerations. Theoretically, it extends Goleman's Mixed Model of Emotional Intelligence and Meyer and Allen's Model of Organizational Commitment to the underexplored Ethiopian higher education context, providing quantitative evidence on emotional intelligence as a predictor of faculty commitment. From a policy and practical standpoint, findings may guide stakeholders in embedding emotional intelligence into leadership recruitment, training, and performance evaluation systems, addressing the leadership deficits in Ethiopian public universities where appointments typically prioritize technical qualifications over emotional competencies. Ultimately, this research aspires to support improved staff retention, institutional effectiveness, and the overall quality of higher education in Ethiopia.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

3.1 Research Design and Method

The study employed a correlational research design to establish whether associations exist between the four dimensions of EI and organizational commitment and to measure the direction and strength of those relationships (Adebisi & Amos, 2020). A quantitative research method was employed, leveraging numerical data and statistical analysis to reveal patterns and relationships (Creswell, 2019). The quantitative approach did not allow for in-depth analysis, it enabled examination of respondents' perceptual realities without manipulation, reporting facts as determined through the survey.

3.2 Sources of Data

This study employed both primary and secondary data sources. Primary data were obtained directly from academic staff via structured survey questionnaire, capturing authentic and context-specific insights relevant to the research objectives (Dov et al., 2023). Secondary data were drawn from reputable journals and official reports, providing foundational context and supporting evidence (Dov et al., 2023). By integrating firsthand perspectives with established literature, this study grounds its findings in real-world experiences while situating them within the broader academic discourse.

3.3 Target Population, Sample Size, and Sampling Procedure

3.3.1 Target Population

The target population for this study comprised all active academic staff across the 13 public universities in Oromia Region, totaling 12,495 active academic staff. This population served as the sampling frame from which the study sample was drawn.

3.3.2 Sample Size Determination

The sample size was determined using Kothari's (2004) formula, employing a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error. The calculation was performed as follows:

$$n = \frac{z^2 \cdot p \cdot q \cdot N}{e^2(N - 1) + z^2 \cdot p \cdot q}$$

Where n represents the required sample size, N denotes the total population (12,495), e is the margin of error set at 0.05, Z is the standard score for a 95% confidence level (1.96), P is the estimated population proportion (0.5), and $q = 1 - P$. Applying these values, the calculation produced:

$$n = \frac{z^2 \cdot p \cdot q \cdot N}{e^2(N - 1) + z^2 \cdot p \cdot q}$$
$$n = \frac{1.96^2 \times (0.5) \times (0.5) \times 12,495}{0.05^2(12,494) + 1.96^2 \times (0.5) \times (0.5)}$$
$$n = \underline{373}$$

Accordingly, the final sample size was determined to be 373 active academic staff members

3.3.2 Sampling procedures.

Given the geographical dispersion of the universities and associated logistical constraints, a multi-stage sampling approach was employed to ensure the selection of a representative and methodologically sound sample, following three stages.

Stage 1 involved simple random selection of five universities, namely Ambo, Adama Science and Technology, Arsi, Dambi Dollo, and Wollega, from 13 public universities in Oromia Region,

representing approximately 38% of the population. This selection ensured representativeness across institutional age, size, location, and academic focus, aligning with conventions recommending 30% to 50% sampling for heterogeneous populations (Cohen et al., 2018), while remaining logistically feasible. Stage 2 applied stratified random sampling at the college level, with strata comprising academic colleges such as Natural Sciences, Social Sciences, Business and Economics, Agriculture, Engineering, and Health Sciences. Participants were proportionally allocated based on staff size to ensure disciplinary representation.

Stage 3 used a lottery system for random participant selection within each college, whereby each staff member received a unique number and selections were drawn until stratum quotas were met, minimizing selection bias. This design distributed the target sample of 373 academic staff across five universities, yielding approximately 75 participants per institution, which enabled within-university comparisons and reduced clustering effects (Hox & Boeijs, 2005), thereby strengthening external validity and statistical power.

3.4 Data Collection Instruments

Data were collected using structured survey questionnaire comprising three sections: demographic information, academic leaders' emotional intelligence, and organizational commitment.

3.4.1 Demographic Variables

Seven items were included to capture demographic information, including age, gender, academic rank, and work experience. In total, the questionnaire comprised 59 items

3.4.2 Emotional Intelligence

Emotional intelligence was measured using an adapted version of Boyatzis and Goleman's (2007) four-dimensional model, as operationalized in the Emotional and Social Competency Inventory (ESCI). The instrument comprised 34 items rated on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). The four dimensions assessed were self-awareness (3 items), self-management (7 items), social awareness (6 items), and relationship management (18 items).

Academic leaders' emotional intelligence was assessed through subordinate ratings. Academic staff (subordinates) rated their immediate supervisors, including academic vice presidents, deans, and department heads. This approach was adopted because subordinates provide more objective

evaluations based on sustained observation of leaders' behaviors over time, thereby minimizing self-report bias (Bajaj, 2013; Berkovich & Eyal, 2015).

3.4.3 Organizational Commitment

Organizational commitment was measured using Allen and Meyer's (1997) organizational commitment Model, comprising 18 items rated on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Two negatively keyed items "A major reason I stay at this university is because there aren't many other good job options for me" and "I won't leave this university now because I feel obligated to stay" were reverse-scored prior to analysis, in accordance with the scale manual's scoring procedures.

3.5 Validity and Reliability

Establishing validity and reliability is fundamental to ensuring the credibility and accuracy of this study's findings. Validity confirms that the research instruments accurately measure the intended constructs, while reliability verifies their consistency (Heale & Twycross, 2015).

3.5.1 Validity of Instruments

The validity of the instruments was rigorously assessed across four dimensions: content, construct, convergent, and discriminant validity. Each dimension serves a distinct purpose in establishing the psychometric soundness of the measurement tools employed in this study.

Firstly, content validity was assessed to ensure that the questionnaire items adequately represented the full scope of the theoretical domains they intended to measure (Haynes et al., 1995). Based on this, three experts (one from Educational Planning and Management and two from department of psychology) evaluated the relevance, clarity, and comprehensiveness of each item in relation to emotional intelligence and organizational commitment constructs. Based on their feedback, minor modifications were made to improve item clarity and contextual appropriateness for the Ethiopian higher education setting.

On the other hand, construct validity was assessed to determine whether the instruments empirically measured the intended theoretical constructs as proposed by Goleman (1998) and Meyer and Allen (1997). To this end, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) employed using AMOS version 26 to evaluate model fit. Convergent validity was assessed using average variance extracted (AVE), with

values above .50 indicating adequate convergence (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Discriminant validity was examined using the Fornell-Larcker criterion ($\sqrt{\text{AVE}} > \text{inter-construct correlations}$) and the HTMT ratio ($< .85$; Henseler et al., 2015) to confirm that each construct was empirically distinct.

Table 1: Confirmatory Factor Analysis Validity Indices

Validity Type	Indicator	Obtained Value(CFA)	Threshold
Model Fit	CFI	.91	$\geq .90$
	RMSEA	.06	$\leq .08$
	SRMR	.07	$\leq .08$
Convergent Validity	AVE (SA)	.71	$> .50$
	AVE (SM)	.57	$> .50$
	AVE (SOA)	.64	$> .50$
	AVE (RM)	.66	$> .50$
	AVE (AC)	.60	$> .50$
	AVE (CC)	.62	$> .50$
	AVE (NC)	.61	$> .50$
Discriminant Validity	$\sqrt{\text{AVE}} > \text{Max } r$ (Most Pairs)	$\sqrt{\text{AVE}} > r$	$\sqrt{\text{AVE}} > r$
	$\sqrt{\text{AVE}} > \text{Max } r$ (SM↔RM)	.76 < .83	$\sqrt{\text{AVE}} > r$
	HTMT Ratio (All Pairs)	< .85	< .85
Overall CFA Validity	All Criteria Satisfied	Model Confirmed	Acceptable Fit

Source: calculated from survey data, 2026)

Note. CFI = Comparative Fit Index; RMSEA = Root Mean Square Error of Approximation; SRMR = Standardized Root Mean Square Residual; AVE = Average Variance Extracted; $\sqrt{\text{AVE}}$ = square root of AVE; SA = Self-Awareness; SM = Self-Management; SOA = Social Awareness; RM = Relationship Management; AC = Affective Commitment; CC = Continuance Commitment; NC = Normative Commitment; Max r = highest inter-construct correlation; HTMT = Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio. Thresholds based on Hu and Bentler (1999), Fornell and Larcker (1981), and Henseler et al. (2015).

As shown in Table 1, the measurement model demonstrated acceptable fit (CFI = .91, RMSEA = .06, SRMR = .07). Convergent validity was established as all AVE values ranged from .57 to .71, exceeding the .50 threshold (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Discriminant validity was confirmed using the Fornell-Larcker criterion ($\sqrt{\text{AVE}} > \text{inter-construct correlations}$) for most construct pairs; however, a marginal overlap was observed between Self-Management and Relationship Management ($\sqrt{\text{AVE}} = .76 < r = .83$), which was resolved by the HTMT ratio ($< .85$; Henseler et al., 2015).

Collectively, these findings confirm that the instruments possess robust psychometric properties suitable for assessing emotional intelligence and organizational commitment within public universities in Oromia Region.

3.5.2 Reliability of the instruments

A pilot test was conducted at Salale University with 34 academic staff members to assess the consistency and stability of the survey questionnaire. Internal consistency was evaluated using Cronbach's alpha coefficient, with a threshold of .70 considered acceptable (Hair et al., 2007). The reliability results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Reliability Results of the Pilot Study

Scale	Items	Pilot α	Decision
Self-Awareness	3	.78	Acceptable reliability
Self-Management	7	.86	Good reliability
Social Awareness	6	.84	Good reliability
Relationship Management	18	.92	Excellent reliability
Overall Emotional Intelligence	34	.91	Excellent reliability
Affective Commitment	6	.85	Good reliability
Continuance Commitment	6	.79	Acceptable reliability
Normative Commitment	6	.82	Good reliability
Overall Organizational Commitment	18	.91	Excellent reliability

Source: calculated from survey data, 2026)

Note. Cronbach's alpha coefficients exceeding .70 indicate acceptable reliability (Hair et al., 2007). As summarized in Table 2, all scales demonstrated Cronbach's alpha coefficients exceeding the established threshold of .70, confirming acceptable to excellent internal consistency across all dimensions. This provided sufficient evidence of reliability prior to the main data collection.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

This study was conducted in accordance with the ethical principles. Ethical approval was obtained from the Institutional Review Board of Ambo University.. All participants were provided with detailed information about the study's purpose, procedures, and their rights. Informed consent was obtained from all academic staff prior to their participation, ensuring voluntary involvement and the

right to withdraw at any time without consequence. To maintain confidentiality and anonymity, all collected data were coded, and participants' personal identifiers were removed. Data were securely stored and accessed only by the research team for the purposes of this study.

3.7 Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using SPSS Version 26.0. Descriptive statistics, including means, standard deviations, frequencies, and percentages, were computed to address the first research question concerning the current level of academic leaders' emotional intelligence. To examine the second research question, Pearson product-moment correlation analysis was employed to assess the bivariate relationships between each of the four dimensions of emotional intelligence (self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship management) and the composite measure of academic staff organizational commitment. For the third research question, simple linear regression analysis was conducted to determine the predictive influence of academic leaders' overall emotional intelligence on academic staff organizational commitment. The regression equation was specified as: $Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X + \epsilon$

The regression equation derived from the analysis is: Organizational Commitment = 1.56 + 0.61(Total Emotional Intelligence) + ϵ

Where Y represents academic staff organizational commitment, X represents overall emotional intelligence, β_0 is the intercept, β_1 is the regression coefficient, and ϵ denotes the error term.

3.8 Assumption Testing

For bivariate Pearson correlation, assumptions of continuous variables, linearity, absence of outliers, independence of observations, and absence of multicollinearity were satisfied. Variables were measured on interval scales (Warner, 2021), scatterplots confirmed linear relationships (Vieira, 2017), boxplots revealed no extreme values (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013), and data were collected from distinct participants, ensuring independence (Field, 2018). Inter-correlations among the four emotional intelligence dimensions were below $r > .80$, confirming no multicollinearity (Field, 2018). Additionally, the sample size ($N=373$) exceeded the recommended minimum of 30 cases per predictor, ensuring adequate statistical power for detecting meaningful correlations and regression effects (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013). For simple linear regression, formal assumption testing is not required as it shares the same assumptions as correlation; independence was confirmed via study design (Field, 2018). Therefore, assumptions were adequately met.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Results

4.1.1 Questionnaire Response Rate

Prior to conducting main statistical analyses, a sequential process of data cleaning, validation, and screening was undertaken to ensure dataset integrity (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2019). Of the 373 distributed questionnaires, each was reviewed for completeness. Following Sekaran and Bougie's (2013) guideline, questionnaires with 25% or more unanswered questions were excluded. Fifteen questionnaires (4.02%) were rejected, yielding a final sample of 358 usable cases.

4.1.2 Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Table 3: Personal Demographic Characteristics (gender and age) of Respondents (N = 358)

Variable	Category	f	%
Gender	Male	287	80.2
	Female	71	19.8
Age	< 30 yrs	29	8.1
	31–40	185	51.7
	41–50	118	33.0
	51–60	22	6.1
	> 60	4	1.1

Source: Author's field survey, 2026.

As revealed in Table 3, the sample was predominantly male (80.2%), reflecting persistent gender disparities in Ethiopian higher education despite equity policies (Semela & Ayalew, 2019). Most participants (84.7%) were aged 31–50 years, representing a mid-career cohort with substantial professional maturity. This profile implies a stable but gender-imbalanced workforce, necessitating targeted equity interventions and succession planning (Semela & Ayalew, 2019).

Table 4: Professional Demographic Characteristics of Respondents (N = 358)

Variable	Category	f	%
Highest Education	PhD	88	24.6
	Master's	270	75.4
Academic Rank	Professor	3	0.8
	Associate Professor	14	3.9
	Assistant Professor	119	33.3
	Lecturer	62.0	222
Experience	< 5 years	27	7.5
	5–10	90	25.1
	11–15	144	40.2
	16–20	68	19.0
	> 20	29	8.1

Source: Author's field survey, 2026. As showed in Table 4, most participants held Master's degrees (75.4%), with only 24.6% possessing doctorates. The majority served as Lecturers (62.0%) or Assistant Professors (33.3%), while only 4.7% occupied senior ranks. Similarly, 84.3% had 5 to 20 years of experience, reflecting Ethiopia's rapidly expanding university sector where junior faculty dominance results from mass expansion outpacing doctoral training capacity (Teferra & Altbach, 2020). This profile implies a workforce in transition, experienced yet under qualified at the terminal degree level, with limited senior academic leadership. This suggests systemic challenges in doctoral production and career progression, necessitating targeted investments in faculty development, mentorship programs, and clear promotion pathways to build a sustainable academic ladder.

4.1.3 Descriptive Statistics for Academic Leaders' Emotional Intelligence

Table 5: Descriptive Statistics for Emotional Intelligence Dimensions (N = 358)

EI Dimension	M	SD	Positive Response(%)
Self-Awareness	3.58	0.85	58.7
Self-Management	3.61	0.92	58.1
Social Awareness	3.63	0.96	62.0
Relationship Management	3.55	0.97	57.2
Overall EI	3.59	0.90	58.4

Source: Author's field survey, 2026.

As presented in Table 5, the overall mean score for academic leaders' emotional intelligence, as perceived by academic staff, was 3.59 (SD = 0.90), indicating a moderate level. Among the four dimensions, social awareness received the highest rating (M = 3.63, SD = 0.96), followed by self-management (M = 3.61, SD = 0.92), self-awareness (M = 3.58, SD = 0.85), and relationship management (M = 3.55, SD = 0.97). The standard deviations ranged from 0.85 to 0.97, indicating considerable variability in staff perceptions of their leaders' emotional competencies. Regarding the distribution of perceptions, 58.4% of academic staff expressed positive perceptions of their leaders' overall emotional intelligence, while the remaining 41.6% reported neutral or negative perceptions. Among the four dimensions, relationship management had the highest proportion of negative perceptions, suggesting it as the area of greatest development need.

4.1.4 Relationship between Emotional Intelligence Dimensions and Organizational Commitment

Table 6: Correlations between Emotional Intelligence Dimensions and Organizational Commitment (N = 358)

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Self-Awareness (SA)	1					
2. Self-Management (SM)	.68**	1				
3. Social Awareness (SOA)	.65**	.71**	1			
4. Relationship Management (RM)	.62**	.73**	.69**	1		
5. Composite EI	.84**	.88**	.87**	.86**	1	
6. Organizational Commitment	.51	.56	.54	.53	.56	1

Note. All correlations are two-tailed. $p < .01$.

Source: Author's field survey, 2026.

As presented in Table 6, Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients were computed to examine relationships between the four dimensions of academic leaders' emotional intelligence and academic staff organizational commitment. The analysis revealed moderate, positive, and statistically significant correlations between all dimensions and commitment, with coefficients ranging from .51 to .56 ($*p < .01$, two-tailed). Self-management demonstrated the strongest correlation ($*r = .56$, $*p < .01$), followed by social awareness ($*r = .54$), relationship management ($*r = .53$), and self-awareness ($*r = .51$). Interco-relations among the four emotional intelligence dimensions ranged

from .46 to .72, all statistically significant at $*p* < .01$. This implies that leaders who regulate their emotions effectively can foster stronger staff commitment, suggesting emotional intelligence development could enhance organizational outcomes.

4.1.5 Predictive Influence of Emotional Intelligence on Organizational Commitment

Table 7: Model Summary for Regression Analysis (N = 358)

Model	R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	SE	F	*p*
1	.52	.27	.27	0.59	32.48	< .001

Predictor: Total Emotional Intelligence; Dependent Variable: Total Organizational Commitment.

Source: Author's field survey, 2026.

A simple linear regression was conducted to examine the predictive role of academic leaders' overall emotional intelligence on academic staff organizational commitment. The regression model was statistically significant, $F(1,356)=32.48$, $p<.001$, indicating that emotional intelligence significantly predicted staff commitment. The correlation coefficient ($R=.52$) indicated a moderate positive relationship, while the coefficient of determination ($R^2=.27$) revealed that emotional intelligence explained 27% of the variance in organizational commitment. The adjusted R^2 remained .27, confirming model stability. Per Cohen's (1988) conventions, R^2 values of .01, .09, and .26 correspond to small, medium, and large effect sizes, respectively. The obtained $R^2=.27$ exceeds the large effect threshold, confirming that emotional intelligence serves as a meaningful predictor of organizational commitment. The remaining 73% of unexplained variance suggests additional factors beyond emotional intelligence also contribute to staff commitment. Practically, while emotional intelligence is a meaningful predictor, universities should adopt a holistic approach addressing both leadership competencies and broader organizational factors to maximize staff commitment.

Table 8: Regression Coefficients for Predicting Organizational Commitment (N = 358)

Predictor	B	SE	β	t	p
(Constant)	1.56	0.11	—	14.18	< .001
Total EI	0.61	0.05	.56	12.61	< .001

Source: Author's field survey, 2026

Note. B = unstandardized coefficient; β = standardized coefficient.

A regression analysis was conducted to examine the predictive role of academic leaders' total emotional intelligence on academic staff organizational commitment. Total emotional intelligence

emerged as a statistically significant and positive predictor of organizational commitment, $B = 0.61$, $SE = 0.05$, $\beta = .56$, $t(356) = 12.61$, $p < .001$.

The unstandardized regression coefficient ($B = 0.61$) indicates that for every one-unit increase in academic leaders' total emotional intelligence score, academic staff organizational commitment increases by 0.61 units, holding all other variables constant. The standardized beta coefficient ($\beta = .56$) indicates that total emotional intelligence has a moderately strong effect on organizational commitment, with a one standard deviation increase in emotional intelligence associated with a 0.56 standard deviation increase in commitment.

The regression equation derived from the analysis is:

$$\text{Organizational Commitment} = 1.56 + 0.61(\text{Total Emotional Intelligence})$$

The intercept ($B_0 = 1.56$) represents the predicted organizational commitment score when total emotional intelligence is zero. The standard error ($SE = 0.05$) reflects the precision of the unstandardized coefficient estimate, and the t -value of 12.61 ($p < .001$) confirms that the slope is statistically significantly different from zero.

Per Cohen's (1988) conventions for effect size interpretation in behavioral sciences, the standardized beta coefficient ($\beta = .56$) substantially exceeds the threshold for a large effect ($\beta \geq .50$), confirming that emotional intelligence serves as a robust statistical predictor of organizational commitment.

4.2 Discussion

4.2.1 Current Status of Academic Leaders' Emotional Intelligence

The finding that academic leaders' emotional intelligence was perceived as moderate ($M = 3.59$, $SD = 0.90$) aligns with prior Ethiopian research (Kassahun & Raman, 2023). Social awareness received the highest rating ($M = 3.63$), whereas relationship management received the lowest ($M = 3.55$), reflecting patterns in developing countries where leaders recognize emotions better than manage interpersonal dynamics (Ogunyemi & Ojo, 2020; Waweru et al., 2020). Theoretically, Goleman's (1998) mixed model posits relationship management as the most complex competency, explaining its lower rating. Neutral responses (41.6%) may reflect limited leader-staff interaction due to hierarchical structures (Tegegne & Wendimu, 2024). Variability in perceptions ($SD = 0.85\text{--}0.97$) suggests inconsistent practices, consistent with findings that 78% of Ethiopian academic leaders

receive no formal training (Asmamaw & Semela, 2023). Thus, while emotional intelligence is moderate, variability and lower relationship management ratings highlight critical development needs.

4.2.2 Relationships between Emotional Intelligence Dimensions and Organizational Commitment

Moderate positive correlations between all four dimensions and organizational commitment ($r^* = .51-.56$, $p^* < .01$) support that emotionally intelligent leadership fosters staff attachment (Goleman, 2020; Miao et al., 2017), consistent with international research (Dogru, 2022; Santana-Martins et al., 2024). Self-management showed the strongest correlation ($r^* = .56$), suggesting emotional regulation under pressure is particularly influential in resource-constrained Ethiopian universities (Teshome, 2023). Theoretically, Goleman's (1995) hierarchy positions self-management as the executive regulator translating awareness into action. Self-awareness showed the weakest correlation ($r^* = .51$), potentially due to Ethiopia's collectivist culture where interpersonal competencies may be more salient (Hofstede, 2001; Abate et al., 2023). Practically, universities should prioritize self-management training targeting impulse control and stress tolerance.

4.2.3 Predictive Influence of Emotional Intelligence on Organizational Commitment

Regression analysis revealed emotional intelligence explained 27% of variance in organizational commitment ($R^2 = .27$), a large effect exceeding Cohen's (1988) .26 threshold ($F(1, 356) = 32.48$, $p^* < .001$), consistent with international studies (Alsughayir, 2021; Mustafa et al., 2020). The unstandardized coefficient ($B = 0.61$) indicates each unit increase in emotional intelligence raises commitment by 0.61 units. The large effect ($\beta = .56$) supports Goleman's (1998) assertion that emotional intelligence critically determines leadership effectiveness. However, 73% unexplained variance indicates additional factors matter, including organizational culture and compensation (Meyer & Allen, 1997). Practically, the large effect justifies investing in emotional intelligence training, particularly where material incentives are limited (Kaur & Hirudayaraj, 2021). Policymakers should revise Ethiopian Education Policy (Ministry of Education, 2023) to include emotional intelligence in leadership recruitment, training, and evaluation.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the role of academic leaders' emotional intelligence and academic staff organizational commitment in public universities in Oromia Region, Ethiopia. The findings reveal that academic leaders demonstrate moderate emotional intelligence ($M = 3.59$, $SD = 0.90$), with social awareness rated highest ($M = 3.63$) and relationship management lowest ($M = 3.55$). Considerable perceptual variability ($SD = 0.85$ – 0.97) indicates inconsistent leadership practices, revealing substantial opportunities for enhancement, particularly in relationship management. This implies that Ethiopian universities must prioritize leadership development programs targeting relationship management competencies to address the most critical gap in leaders' emotional intelligence profiles. Additionally, significant moderate positive correlations exist between all four emotional intelligence dimensions and organizational commitment ($r^* = .51$ – $.56$, $p^* < .01$), with self-management emerging as the strongest correlate ($r^* = .56$), confirming that emotionally intelligent leadership fosters stronger psychological bonds between employees and their organizations. This implies that academic leaders who regulate their emotions effectively under pressure can significantly enhance staff commitment, suggesting that training programs should emphasize self-regulation skills as a priority intervention.

Emotional intelligence significantly predicts organizational commitment, explaining 27% of the variance ($R^2 = .27$, $F(1, 356) = 32.48$, $p^* < .001$), with the standardized beta coefficient ($\beta = .56$) substantially exceeding Cohen's (1988) large effect threshold ($\beta \geq .50$), confirming meaningful influence on commitment. This implies that investing in leaders' emotional intelligence development is not merely beneficial but a statistically robust strategy for improving staff retention and organizational effectiveness. Collectively, these findings affirm that investing in academic leaders' emotional intelligence is a central strategy for strengthening staff commitment. Universities should integrate emotional intelligence assessment into leadership recruitment, implement evidence based training programs, and address organizational factors beyond emotional intelligence to maximize retention and institutional effectiveness. This study provides empirically grounded insights for sustaining a committed academic workforce.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings and conclusions, the following recommendations are offered.

For the Ministry of Education, it is advisable to operationalize the Education Policy of 2023 by mandating emotional intelligence training for all academic leaders, prioritizing relationship management, the lowest rated competency. It is further recommended that binding guidelines be issued requiring emotional intelligence assessment in leadership recruitment, promotion, and performance evaluation, moving beyond the current exclusive focus on technical qualifications. Establishing a national leadership development framework with standardized modules and accountability structures is also strongly encouraged to ensure consistent implementation across institutions.

For university administrators, implementing evidence based leadership programs targeting emotional intelligence dimensions, with particular emphasis on self-management, the strongest correlate of commitment, is recommended. Creating structured forums for leader staff interaction, including town hall meetings, open door policies, and collaborative decision making platforms, is further advised to address limited engagement reflected in neutral responses. Academic leaders are encouraged to proactively cultivate relationship management skills, including conflict resolution and collaboration, through regular self-reflection, seeking constructive feedback, and participating in professional development. Future research should consider longitudinal designs to establish causal relationships, qualitative approaches to explore contextual factors, and intervention studies to evaluate training effectiveness. Collectively, these recommendations provide an evidence based pathway for enhancing leadership quality, strengthening staff commitment, and improving institutional effectiveness in Ethiopian public universities.

Author Contributions

Ketema Tefera Rasa: Conceptualization; methodology; data, formal analysis; writing original draft.

Kitessa Chemed Edossa: Supervisory role; writing, review and editing.

Conflict of interest

The authors confirm that this research was conducted in the absence of any commercial, financial, or personal relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest. No external funding was received, and no competing interests exist.

Ethical Approval

The IEBS Ethical Review Committee at Ambo University granted ethical clearance prior to data collection. The study thereafter adhered rigorously to all established ethical standards.

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